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7. — *Joseph and his Brethren: a Dramatic Poem*. By CHARLES WELLS. With an Introduction by ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE. London : Chatto and Windus. 1876. Cr. 8vo. pp. xix, 252.

THE fate of this interesting book forms a curious chapter in literary history, and is well fitted to serve as a text for a long sermon on the uncertainty of fame and the unsoundness of contemporary judgment. Its author, Charles J. Wells, who was born in the early part of this century, was an intimate friend of Keats and R. H. Horne, and perhaps more than an acquaintance of Hazlitt. It was to him that Keats addressed the sonnet, "To a Friend who sent me some Roses," in which, it will be remembered, is the line, —

"But when, O Wells! thy roses came to me."

Mention of him is also made in Keats's correspondence. In 1822 he published a prose volume called "Stories after Nature," of which there are but two copies now known to be in existence, one at the British Museum, the other at the Bodleian Library. Some of the stories, however, we learn from an interesting letter in the "Athenæum" of April 8, 1876, were reprinted about thirty years ago by Mr. W. J. Linton, in the "Illustrated Family Journal," with illustrations by Mr. F. R. Pickersgill, and were afterwards reissued by him in the "Illuminated Magazine," in which may be found the early work of some men who since that time have become more or less well known, such as Leech, W. H. Dixon, and others. It was in the last-named periodical that "Claribel," one of the "Stories after Nature," was for the first time reprinted. Indeed, Mr. Linton admired this one so much that he dramatized it and published it in his "Claribel, and other Poems," which appeared in London in 1865. In an introductory note he says, "To my friend, Charles Wells, — the author of that most noble dramatic poem, 'Joseph and his Brethren,' — I owe the story of 'Claribel'; and not only the story, but also numerous passages (in the first, second, and fifth scenes of the second act), of which I have done little more than adapt the measure." What the passages are the reader will most probably have to conjecture; the whole poem is a notable one, and the story, dealing with the love of a king's daughter for a page, and her rejection of his best friend, Prince Casimir, and their tragic fate, is fine enough in itself to justify the warm praise given to the original and its companions, by those who have seen them. The scenes in which Mr. Linton has done hardly more than to adapt the measure are not noticeably superior to the rest of the play, but it may be that these lines are from the story : —

“You should have seen
 Prince Casimir approach, with eyes downcast,
 To kiss the princess' hand ; you would have thought
 Some pilgrim met a cross in the wilderness, —
 He bowed such adoration, and so held
 Her white hand in his touch. But when he rose,
 'T was plain to read the victory in his face,” etc.

They have somewhat the sound of parts of “Joseph and his Brethren,” as extracts further on will show. Besides these tales and the poem that has so recently been disinterred, his sole printed contributions to literature are a sonnet to Chaucer, prefixed to “Chaucer Modernized,” edited by Horne in 1841, and two articles in “Fraser's Magazine.” This is the sonnet which bears the date of 1823 :—

“English Chaucer ! oft to thy glory old
 Thy sire-ship in poesy, thy fame,
 Dull'd not by dusty Time (which aye will hold
 Thy name up, banner high, bright as a flame
 That burns on holy altar), — have my ears,
 Like portals, wide been opened. Great fears
 And worldly cares were on me ; but a hand
 Power-fraught with this rich gift, hath gently fann'd
 My sorrow'd spirit to a ripe zeal fine.
 Now gaze I like young Bacchus on his wine,
 And own no check from sorrow's hollow frown,
 Full-hearted that the wrestler is down ;
 Strong as an eagle gone up to the sun,
 Dull earth I quit, and stray with Chaucer on.”

The first of the two articles in “Fraser's Magazine” appeared in the number for October, 1846 ; the second in that for June, 1847. They are entertaining and readable, but not much above the ordinary level of good magazine articles. In the earlier one Mr. Wells described boar-hunting in Brittany very vividly, and for a sequel he wrote a story of the way in which one of the gentlemen he met there won his wife's love. She married him at her parents' order, detesting him, while he secures her affections by letting her see the worthlessness of the devotion she received in society, and the depth of his own. Any one who can lay his hands upon the volumes would do well to read the two articles.

This is certainly a meagre record for a man who had written a poem which had shown his fitness to stand among the best of modern English verse-writers. It was in 1824 that he published his masterpiece, “Joseph and his Brethren,” under the pseudonyme of H. L. Howard. From the letter in the “Athenæum,” referred to above,

from which we derive most of our knowledge of the facts of his life, we learn that he left to a friend the task of seeing the volume through the press, and that he himself spoke of the poem as "litter." It fell perfectly flat; Hazlitt read it and said that it showed great genius, but he advised its author to stick to his profession, the law. Horne, when he had seen it, advised him to stick to poetry; but Mr. Wells followed the advice of neither. He remained for a time in London, writing parts of plays in such a way as, it is safe to say, with Mr. Watts, in the "Athenæum," "no other man of the time could have written them," and delighting his friends with his conversation. After that he moved to the Continent, and is now living in Marseilles, receiving tardy thanks and delayed honor for this book. At times he has possibly smiled grimly when reading remarks in self-complacent literary journals about the accuracy of modern criticism and the glories of English literature; but, at any rate, he is likely to be known for more years than he has been unknown, and posterity will grant him what has been denied him by his contemporaries. Although the book met with no public attention at the time, it did not wholly sink into oblivion, near as it came to it. In the "Monthly Repository," New Series, for March, 1837, the editor, Mr. Wells's old friend, R. H. Horne, wrote a notice of Wells, and in his "New Spirit of the Age," published in 1844, in an article on Henry, now Sir Henry, Taylor, and the author of "Festus," he made the following allusion to him: "Imaginative and impassioned poetry has not been so uncommon among us as may have been thought. Those whom 'it concerned' in nearly every instance discovered it, and welcomed it. Besides those who are already recognized, there have been, and are, others. Several of these little known, or unknown, works we will mention. It is a service of abstract love; and we trust it will be received, not in a resentful, but a kindly spirit, by those who may now hear of them for the first time. One of the least known, published as long since as 1824, under the unpromising title of 'Joseph and his Brethren,' was full of the elements of true poetry, — in passion, imagination, and in thoughts, resulting from the reason and the understanding. It also displayed great descriptive powers." The next remark is less happy and possibly quenched in some the desire of looking the poem up, for Mr. Horne goes on: "The resemblance of the author's mind to that of P. J. Bailey, the author of 'Festus,' is extraordinary." But even this statement did not deter Mr. D. G. Rossetti from seeking the book in the British Museum and from praising it warmly, — "without resentment," — when he had read it. In his supplementary chapter to Gilchrist's "Life of Wil-

liam Blake," Vol. I. p. 381, he said: "This work is, perhaps, the solitary instance, within our period, of poetry of the very first class falling quite unrecognized, and continuing so for a long space of years." If we may be pardoned the digression, it is possibly worthy of note that another instance of such neglect is the way in which Mr. Fitzgerald's translations, and especially that of Omar Khayyam, have been treated by the English, who have but recently begun to do them justice. Not only did his version fall dead on the market, but it was ignored by critics as well as by readers, and it was in this country that it first secured recognition in the number of this Review for October, 1869. In the course of the next year an article referring to the one which had appeared in these pages was published in "Fraser's Magazine," but it produced no effect, and only after another article, published in March of this year, in the "Contemporary Review," was any general interest aroused in this remarkable book. Meanwhile English literary moralists were perpetually reproaching us Americans with neglect of our own Walt Whitman and Joaquin Miller, making contrasts likely to promote international hatred and to undo the good effect of the Treaty of Washington. The author of the article in the "Contemporary" spoke in a singular way of the success of Mr. Fitzgerald's translation of Omar Khayyam in this country, saying that it met with approval "in a small section of American society," as if in England the quatrains were sung by miners, marketmen, railway-guards, cabbies, milkmen, prize-fighters, and ecclesiastics, and quoted in Parliament and at labor-reform meetings.

Mr. Swinburne was led by Mr. Rossetti's warm praise of "*Joseph and his Brethren*" to look up the original in the British Museum, and so much was he struck by its merits that he wrote an article about it, which he sent to "Fraser's Magazine," but it was declined by Mr. Froude, the editor. This was thirteen years ago. Meanwhile Mr. Rossetti had been in vain endeavoring to find a publisher for the play, which Mr. Wells, stimulated by Mr. Rossetti's enthusiasm, had consented to revise and put into better shape. But the publishers were averse to touching it; a Scriptural drama seldom tempts the public; and an unknown poem, forty or fifty years old, has but little charm for the vast majority of readers, who care more for novelty in what they take up than for anything else. Mr. Swinburne, too, neglected no opportunity of praising Mr. Wells. In his essay on Blake, p. 13, he says: "In dramatic passion, in dramatic character, and in dramatic language," his "great play is no doubt far ahead, not of Blake's work only, but of most other men's," and that it was "a poem which for strength of manner and freshness of treatment may cer-

tainly recall Blake or any other obscurely original reformer in art." When a publisher was found for "*Joseph and his Brethren*," the condition was made that its appearance should be preceded by Mr. Swinburne's article calling attention to it and giving numerous extracts. This came out more than a year ago in the "*Fortnightly Review*"; and now, when there are only three copies of the original in existence, so far as known, we have this volume before us with the opportunity to pass judgment upon the indifference of our fathers and to test the reasonableness of the raptures of newer critics.

In the first place, almost every one will have more or less strongly a feeling of conservative prejudice in favor of the justice of those who let the poem drop, which, however, may possibly lose its strength through the present fashionable dread of being thought illiberal; and moreover there are some, especially in this country, who will hold their enthusiasm in check as they recall the fact that Mr. Wells's warmest backers are Mr. Swinburne and Mr. Rossetti. The first-named of these gentlemen often takes hasty aim and misses the target; and when it is remembered that he expresses the utmost contempt for Alfred de Musset, while almost worshipping Victor Hugo, that he has no words too good for Walt Whitman, while he is foul-mouthed in his abuse of Mr. Lowell and Mr. Emerson, one is apt to think that his feelings sometimes run away with him, as the saying is, and that he writes some of his criticisms in the same spirit in which it may be imagined that war-songs are composed shortly before action. Indeed, in his prefatory notice to the book, he says that it was "not unworthy of the time when England still held, or still divided with the land of Goethe, that place at the head of European literature which France was to assume and retain after the mighty movement of 1830"; a remark which seems to display a good deal of credulity for a critic so positive in his statements, and is of a sort to arouse distrust. But those who feel any doubts about the excellence of "*Joseph and his Brethren*" can do nothing better than to take up the book and settle the question for themselves. If they distrust the critics, and open the volume with perfect impartiality, they deserve to be congratulated on their good fortune, for soon they will know a feeling every one has sighed for, that, namely, of reading a masterpiece without knowing beforehand exactly what they are going to think about it, and they will become quickly aware that they have before them a great enjoyment, and a sort of enjoyment that is only increased by iteration, for the poem is found to improve with frequent reading. It is, if anything, too rich to be taken in at once, to be enjoyed without due lingering and repeated return to the finer passages,

and much is so compactly written that the full meaning is not caught at the first glance. Another thing to be noticed is that extracts do it no manner of justice ; the poem contains no complete, epigrammatic lines which condense a scene and can be detached and handed about for admiration without harm to the whole. A great part of the fineness of "Joseph and his Brethren" lies in its majesty, which is not fairly represented by taking out bits here and there ; and passages of great force in the context seem cold and lifeless when taken from their proper surroundings. Nevertheless that is the only thing left to do, and this word of warning must serve to prevent a possible feeling of disappointment at the inadequacy of parts to prove the merit of the whole. After all, this toleration is not much to ask ; a poet writes lines for their place in his poem, not for the adornment of a review, or, at any rate, that should be his method, although there may be some who do not follow it, and who care more for lines which may be transferred into a book-notice, than for the value of their poem as a whole.

"Joseph and his Brethren" is a dramatic poem, and not a play intended for representation. It is divided into acts and scenes, but without reference to the stage, with prologues full of impressive descriptions, and with conversations in the body of the poem, so that there is retained what is of value in the dramatic form, with freedom from its restrictions. The opening prologue to the first act strikes the note which prevails throughout the poem, of richness and fulness of sound, and of that use of language which has been unknown among writers of English since the time of the greatest of the dramatists. Thus, for example, is evening described :—

"The shepherd beats his bell ; the tranquil herds
Lowling obedience, from the dimpled spring
(Where the bright flowers disturb'd with their sweet breath
Tremble like starry gems in Dian's hair),
Slow wind the hill, and in their staked folds
Snuff the fresh straw and scent the keener wind,
Crook their sleek knees to welcome night's repose.
The Sun while sinking from his daily round
Had starr'd the heavens like a fiery flaw,
Showing his glory greater than the west :
Glancing the Moon and fighting her faint beam,
Across the barréd portals of the east
His fulgent heat reflected glowing fire.
The dying embers of the burnish'd king,
Now sunk behind the mountain's hemisphere,
Were fading fast away. He was declin'd

(Not like pale Cynthia to her bath, a lake
 Rich in its violet sward and jassmine bowers),
 A god gigantic habited in gold,
 Stepping from off a mount into the sea :
 The evening breeze that whispers of repose,
 And fans the crimson'd marygold to sleep,
 Grows sharp and brisk ; and silence on the light
 Gains step for step, as light retires to shade."

What will be noticed in this passage is the naturalness of the writer, the directness of the way in which he sees nature, as well as the opulence, sometimes tending towards excess, of his power of expression. His style is unmodern, — that is implied in calling it natural, — the writer does not draw the scene as regarded by one in any particular mood, as is done, for instance, in Tennyson's "Lotus-Eaters," and in Morris, *passim*, where there is to be detected laborious struggle after simplicity ; the author sees with a poet's eyes, and what he sees he sets down. Since brief passages are all that can be put into a book-notice, it is passages like this which have no direct bearing on the play which do Mr. Wells most justice. The action of the scenes is nowhere centred in a few brief, terse lines, as we have said ; the development of the plot is slow and unhurried ; it is more like a story that is told than a play that is acted. This impression is only strengthened by the reader's familiarity with the incidents of Joseph's life, which, it may be said, by the way, are very different from those of the stage hero. It is in his management of these that the poet's higher art is seen. He preserves Joseph from appearing odiously superior to his brothers, and in the important scenes with the wife of Potiphar, his great art makes their interviews a struggle between the passion of an imperious woman accustomed to adoration and obedience, and the honor and loyalty of Joseph to his absent master. The gentleman who makes brief mention of recent literature in the "Westminster Review" says in the number for April of this year, that "no amount of excellence in the portrait will persuade the British public even to glance at such a character," and that it will "militate against the popularity" of the poem, a criticism which seems ill-founded, and would argue against the popularity, among such prudent people, of another book, where this character first appears. In fact, however, there is not the slightest touch in any part of "Joseph and his Brethren" which need disturb any one. Phraxanor may be justly compared with Shakespeare's Cleopatra, as has been done by Mr. Swinburne. There is little in the play finer than her arguing with her attendant about the majesty of love : —

" All matters that are greater than ourselves
Do trace their secret graces to our hands.
For glory captains struggle in the fight,
And play against the bulwark of the foe
The o'erbrowing engines in the stubborn siege;
But love doth brace the garland on his head,
Making proud victory sweeter than it is.
What warlike prince doth doff his laurel yet
But he did cast it in some fair maid's lap,
Saying, 'My greatness I commit to thee,
Mistress of it, and me, and my proud heart'?
He who has won whate'er he still desir'd,
Strewing his path with flowers of sweet success,
Is yet a poor and melancholic man,
Sad as a beggar craving in a porch,
Being denied the woman he does love."

Narrowing space forbids ampler justice to this wonderful scene.
One more passage is required, however; Phraxanor says:—

" O ignorant boy! it is the secret hour
The sun of love doth shine most goodly fair.
Contemptible darkness never yet did dull
The splendor of love's palpitating light.
At love's slight curtains, that are made of sighs,
Though e'er so dark, silence is seen to stand
Like to a flower closéd in the night;
Or like a lovely image drooping down
With its fair head aslant and finger rais'd,
And mutely on its shoulder slumbering.
Pulses do sound quick music in Love's ear,
And blended fragrance in his startled breath
Doth hang the hair with drops of magic dew.
All outward thoughts, all common circumstance,
Are buried in the dimple of his smile:
And the great city like a vision sails
From out the closing doors of the hush'd mind."

This curtailed extract fails to make so complete an impression as it does in the original, because its relation to the context is wholly lost, and the reader does not perceive that it stands as the climax of her appeal for Joseph's love; and even when he is told that it does, the mere statement is unsatisfactory, because no description can define and give the tone of the original with its eloquence, imagery, and musical movement. Mr. Wells clings closely to the Bible story; where that is brief he at times builds upon it some grand scenes, as in the long and rich description of the triumphal procession of Pharaoh, of which one of the characters says:—

"The walls did groan.
 The trees did bear more men than ever fruit.
 No dangerous edge, but like a swallow perch'd,
 Some rough Egyptian through his straining eyes
 (Much like a hungry beggar at a feast)
 Suck'd in magnificence. Plenitude fed desire:
 Appetite crav'd past both. No man did know
 That was his house, for still it was o'errun
 By general feet; all vacancies chok'd up.
 Three parts of the city emptied the livers out
 And chok'd the fourth. It were an easy thing
 For twenty men-at-arms to sack the thirds,
 And take the other gazing. Age, youth, brown, fair,
 Were heap'd-up spoils to wonder; faces were
 Like stamp'd coin, huddled in heaps to pay
 A tribute to the sight. — There was a buzz
 Vexing the passing breeze, much like to that
 Whenas a man doth put his wary ear
 Close to a hive of bees; and then a shout
 That made old soldiers redden as they look'd '
 Into each other's thoughts. — O, it was rare!"

Even finer, though too long for quotation, is the account of the procession itself narrated to two belated Egyptians by the speaker of the previous passage, who says here: —

"Cas'd o'er in burnish'd plates I, hors'd, did bear
 A snow-white eagle on a silver shaft,
 From whence great Pharaoh's royal banner stream'd,
 An emblem of his might and dignity;
 And as the minstrelsy burst clanging forth,
 With shouts that broke like thunder from the host,
 The royal bird with kindred pride of power
 Flew up the measure of his silken cord,
 And arch'd his cloud-like wings as he would mount,
 And babble of this glory to the sun."

The reader must take up the book to get the rest. He will find passages reminding him of Keats in the directness of vision which they show, in the swift grasp of what is perceived through the senses, and in the untiring enjoyment of all that is beautiful. The language, too, in its profusion and its picturesque exactness, carries out the resemblance, and shows that the two poets studied with the same teachers, and shared in the influence of the Elizabethan revival. What Wells has added to this literal poetical outfit is a sense of dramatic propriety which the perusal of the book will show, and which will well reward thorough and careful study. Moreover, he has, what

Keats lacked, a perception of the relations human beings bear to one another. Here and there are slight affectations of no importance which were caught up from the authority of the older writers, such as using "power" and "flower" as dissyllables, and employing some words like "strakey" and others, but they hardly deserve mention. The comparison that has been made between this work and that of the great dramatists is not at all a vagary of exaggerated enthusiasm. The last but one of the extracts, marred as it is by losing its congenial setting, shows a Shakespearian accumulation of impressive lines which are not produced by struggling after appropriate "word-painting," which well defines a fashionable literary affectation, but always inspired and controlled by complete naturalness. Towards the end of the play we have often the very words of the Bible retained or but slightly altered to fit the metre.

With one more extract we close ; this is taken from the prologue to Act II., which describes the journey across the desert of the Egyptians, carrying Joseph with them : —

"But though the camp still slumbers undisturb'd,
'Tis not for long this sweet oblivion,
For the vex'd guard who rocks him to and fro
On the uncertain balance of his spear,
At odds with sleep, with eyes weigh'd down, subdued,
Whose sense of hearing lingers on the edge
And painful confines of half consciousness,
And blendeth with its fading powers : — a noise
Like a loud whisper hangeth in the air!
As it approaches nearer it becomes
Like the north wind when rushing through the trees,
Thence to a roaring and a hissing sound
As when the storm makes havoc in the sails
And cordage taut of some betosséd ship,
In answering discord to the ruthing waves ;
Now he looks up, behold, in darken'd space,
As a huge dragon stretching many a rood,
The birds of night as blended into one,
In the obscurity themselves have made,
Bent on their measur'd migratory flight,
Wing their slow way across the desert sands,
Aweary of the forage they have left,
Shunning the inhospitable Dead Sea shore,
Where fish nor fowl make willing residence,
Shaping their course with oblique certitude
Towards the ever-teeming fruitful Nile.
And now the advance guard wheels above the camp,

Sweeps a wide circle and descends more near,
With a prolong'd and simultaneous cry,
Gives notice to the myriads who respond
With deafening clamor warping on the air,
Rise higher and hold on their safer course."

Those who feel that the quotations do not justify the praise given to the book, will yet, it is to be most earnestly hoped, read the whole poem, when they will see how unsatisfactory are fragments, how inarticulate is even the warmest praise.

We cannot conclude without expressing real reverence, which will be shared by all lovers of poetry who will look at this volume, for the author who at last receives the glory earned half a century ago. It is impossible to give up the hope that during this time his pen has not been wholly idle, and that we may yet have more delight of this sort. Our thanks are also due to Mr. Swinburne for what he has done in rescuing this masterpiece from its undeserved oblivion.

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8. — *The Life of James W. Grimes, Governor of Iowa, 1854–1858; a Senator of the United States, 1859–1869.* By WILLIAM SALTER. New York: D. Appleton & Co. 1876.

SENATOR GRIMES owes his national reputation chiefly to that act of his life which exposed him to the bitterest criticism by political friends, and which closed his political career. "Foremost," in the words of his biographer, "in discerning the peril that threatened the land in the impeachment of President Johnson, the nation owes its escape and safety at that crisis to him more than to any other one man." No one who takes this view of Mr. Grimes's action can be without interest in the record of his life and opinions, which is contained in Mr. Salter's volume.

This record is, for the most part, left to speak for itself, the biographer adding to the correspondence and speeches little more than necessary words of connection or of explanation, and sparing us anecdotes of childhood and fulsome eulogies. In giving, not opinions ready made, but the materials out of which to form our own opinions, and in retaining among those materials judgments that time has not justified, or that many will disagree with, and expressions that spring from the less admirable traits of character, Mr. Salter has done exactly what would have pleased Mr. Grimes, who despised twaddle, and liked to be rated at his exact value. Sometimes, in his anxiety to make the record complete, the biographer has inserted